

["Landlubbers Cruise"]

Beliefs and customs - Folkstuff Copy - 1

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview ?

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER SAUL LEVITT

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE October 31, 1938

SUBJECT "LANDLUBBERS CRUISE" —CHARLES SCHAEFER

1. Date and time of interview October 27, 1938
2. Place of interview Eastchester Bay, L. I. Sound, Vicinity Pelham Bay Park
3. Name and address of informant Charles Schaefer, Eastchester Bay (lives on a barge)
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

(See previous interview with Mr. Schaefer (9/28/38) titled: "Local life and Industry—Schaefer"

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6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

(See previous interview)

Note: When I first called on this informant, he told me that he had written on account of an expedition in a lifeboat from the Bronx to Long Branch (N. J.) which he showed interviewer after exacting promise that none of it would be reprinted or made use of in any way as (so he expressed it) "I expect to sell this to some magazine or publisher." He said he would hand me a brief summary of the manuscript (of about 35,000 words)—and has now done so, with this brief condensation of approximately 1,000 words. As I stated in previous interview: "The story is not well done, but it has some amazing touches. It was a most quixotic exploit, done in 1932, when informant was dead broke. He studied maps of line East River down to the bay, and also of the Jersey shore to Long Branch—a fifty mile trip each way. It was done in a lifeboat with a companion, using two pair pairs of oars. This is a complete adventure in its own right." Interviewer's object in getting this summarized version of the trip was to have it with this informant, in an endeavor to control informant's oral rendering of the story for our collection of folklore studies.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE October 31, 1938

SUBJECT "LANDLUBBERS CRUISE" —CHARLES SCHAEFER PREFACE

This story is written in memory of a real experience had by the Author. In fact the Author was in charge of the entire undertaking, crazy as it all may seem after reading this story. Everything in this story really happened in the year of 1932, between April and the end of August; all but the authors names are fictitious; all places and spots are given in truth and as accurate as possible to the knowledge of the author; all descriptive matter is true to fact, also nothing is exaggerated in its entirety . . . To whatever critics I may have, I would like to say: It's nothing to go cruising in a young battle ship, with every modern gadget on your ship and a special crew trained to every phase of modern navigation; at that rate one surely will have nothing to write home about, or much to write a story about. (?)

- - - The Author.

* * * * * CHAPTER 1 WHY THE CRUISE CAME TO BE PLANNED, AND HOW

Victims of the depression. Work of any kind, we could not find it. As landlubbers preparing for this little cruise, we already began learning some important things. . . We immediately engaged in putting her (the boat) in trim. (a description 2 follows) Oh, charts and nautical instruments of all kinds were conspicuous by their absence. The only things we had for that purpose were the following . . . As for myself I was nothing better than a book navigator, having studied navigation for local piloting from books, and this was to be my first cruise. So with such equipment and such a crew, proceeded the cruise of the landlubbers.

CHAPTER 2 THE START OF THE CRUISE

My wife and son and some friends were at the dock to see us prepare for our cruise and say adieu. . . The date, May 30, 1932. The starting point East 134th St., Port Morris in the Bronx, New York City. Right next to the Hellgate Power House. Our first real port of call was to be Highlands, New Jersey. . . We said goodbye to everyone as if we were going to

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Europe . . . In about thirty minutes we found ourselves nearing the Astoria (Long Island) shore, a little south of the gas works. . . Caution should be used in the matter so as not to get too close to shore, as the current becomes ever stronger on nearing Hellgate, which has a strong side drift so that large Sound steamers slide sideways, so much so that one would think they were sliding on ice, and woe betide the small boat that gets side-swiped by such a vessel . . .

We approached Hell Gate with apprehension, as it was our first passage through here, and were quite conscious of the terrible currents as we had heard many a tale of this place, most of them bad. But we cleared with ease. . . In a few minutes we were passing Welfare Island, the current carrying us so nice now that we only had to row to keep steerage way. It then dawned on us that we could use some music, as we opened up the phonograph and put on some of our Hawaiian music and other dreamy music — you know, sort of sentimental sentimental ; I guess the water brings it with its rhythm, and it must be admitted that while we were passing that Island of Institutions, with our serenade, we could not at any time make out an honest-to-goodness Lorelei. However, we reflected on the fact that we were birds on the outside looking in, and glad of that. . . For as it was interesting passing under New York's giant bridges, Entering Upper New York Bay at 9 P. M., we were at first a little perplexed by the array of numerous and varied lights, buoys, lighthouses, and lights of ships passing this and that way. We were landlubbers with no experience, going night sailing in one of the busiest harbors in the world, with rough water to add to our problem. . . The current movement, aided by rowing, carried us along under ideal weather conditions. Which suggested this poem: The moon and stars were shining bright, The breeze was blowing cool and light, We puffed our pipe and felt serene, And sang "My Isle of Golden Dreams . . ."

. . . Continued in this direction, passed Erie Basin 10 P. M. with a few planks which we took along we prepared to sleep, by laying them over the best seats belts(?) and placing our life [boats?] over them as mattress. We covered ourselves with good woolen blankets, praying that "Good Old Father Neptune would be good to us and not sever our wonderful

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1/4 inch manila rope that held our improvised anchor, or rather iron slugs.” CHAPTER 3
OUR FIRST OPEN WATER

(Following Morning)

Our anchor was holding fine, so all was taken care of in a moment. The boat that had whistled turned out to be one of Uncle Sam's revenue service boats. . We set up our gasoline camp stove and made a pot of coffee for breakfast. (Story goes on to describe day on water. They cross the Narrows and go fishing). . . Soon the bay itself became rougher. To add to our discomfort, the current was now moving against us and the banging of these chimes, all but drove us crazy. The battle against the wind and current was more than we expected. We heaved for two hard hours without stopping, meanwhile the current getting stronger by the minute. (They finally make the Coast Guard Station) I felt like a drunken sailor. . .my 4 legs just would not behave. After a few smokes we went on relating parts of our story. . with many a laugh between. CHAPTER 4 OUR FIRST PORT OF CALL

As for me the fish just did not like me at all and refused to bite at all . . . We rowed downstream toward the Old Highland Railroad Bridge. Hardly past the bridge, we discovered that the river was very shallow except in the channel, and there the current is the worst. Going about one mile due south on the Shrewsbury River, then turning to starboard or westerly into that arm of the river going to Red Bank, and up that about a mile ...which is in the Highlands, New Jersey, we made our first true port of call. (They camp for the night on shore) (Describes fishing near Rumsen next day): However when it was done and we had supper, I caught some killies with our seine. That was my best catch up till now. Sh-sh-sh-I'm blushing. “The killie box waits, sir:” said John. And into it went the poor little fish-how cruel these mortals be - and into the river went the killie box, with a nice wire to a stake to keep it from drifting away; and again we close another day, and as time went on we lost record of dates and days, and almost time. Dates now became periodical. I immediately proceeded to tell them a ghost story of the woman in white who wanders through that particular woods at night. The story went that a woman was found to

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have hanged herself in a tree up there not far from where we camped, and that every night between twelve and one'oclock she could be seen wandering thru the weeds. I particularly impressed them (some boys) that it was a bad omen to see her. CHAPTER 5 OUR NEW HOME

(They live for a time in a tent, and later use a pump house. Every week the wife and son visit informant. They fish to supply addition to larder. But the fishing doesn't work out so well.) Everything was going fine when one day the 5 the owner of the property asked us to leave, for no special reason - but what I could see is that we had been there long enough. We now made preparations to move on to Long Branch, New Jersey. CHAPTER 6 THE SEA GYPSIES MOVE ON

We rowed all morning and afternoon down the Shrewsbury River, and passing the town of Normandy, Sea Bright, and Mammoth Beach, we then came to Port Au Peck, Green Gables, and at last Long Branch. (Describes building of rigging and sail for lifeboat. Then they practice sailini sailing). We made a few short trips to break in our hand at sailing. However, we found that sailing with the wind nearly everything went pretty good - but against the wind, that was something different. . .It was getting near time to depart for home. CHAPTER 7 DESCRIPTION OF STORM ON WAY HOME

The tempest broke like a blast; it turned into a hurricane of some sixty odd miles an hour velocity - that is, according to the weather bureau report of that day. Lightning such as I have never before or since seen lit up the night, and thunder rode the sky. To make matters worse, it began to rain as if we were under a fire hose. Every light blinked and danced, and my eyes could hardly see where I was going as the rain was running like a river down my face. The waves rose and fell; they were churning white caps 20 ft in height, and draughts as deep, which made steering my course very hard, as when in the draughts I had to run blind. . We were making tremendous speed for a tub like ours. . . All the lights seem to blink crazily; the next thing I noticed the lights seem to be rushing towards me. As we neared one of the buoys of Ambrose Channel a sudden calm after the storm, such as

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I cannot explain, happened . . . (Ends with a short description of the return to our “home port”.)